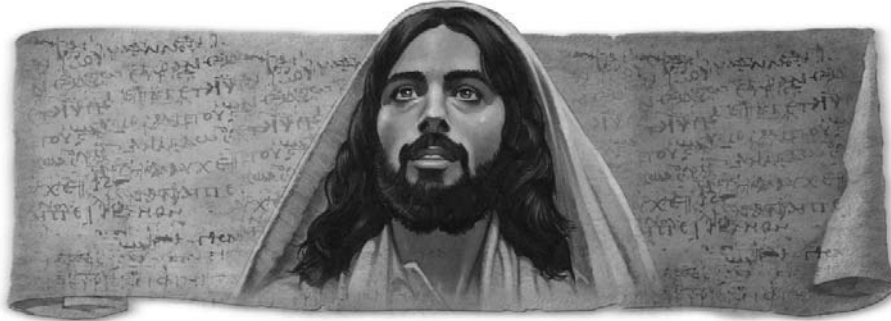


# Jesus and the Letters of John



## SABBATH—JUNE 27

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Skim over the three letters of John.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “The Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. We have seen it. We give witness to it” (1 John 4:14, NIV).

**FALSE TEACHERS SPREADING WRONG TEACHINGS AMONG THE SAINTS?** Wrong views on who Christ is? Power struggles in the church? False religious teachings spreading in the churches? People needing to know that the promise of salvation is sure? Others needing to know that faith must lead to obedience to the law?

Sounds like our church today, right?

But these were some of the issues that John had to deal with almost two thousand years ago in his three short letters in the New Testament.

How true were Solomon's words, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9, NKJV)!

But John does not just tell us what the problems are. He points to God the Father and the Son. He gives us a picture of who They are and what They have done for us and what we must do as Christians.

**A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Why do we believe that John wrote these letters? To whom was he writing? What problems was he writing about? How does he solve those problems? What does John tell us about Jesus? What promises can we get from these books?

**SUNDAY—JUNE 28****FROM WHOM AND TO WHOM—  
AUTHOR AND READERS OF THE  
LETTERS (1 John 1:1–3)**

First John begins without the author telling us who he is. The second and third letters mention the author as a person who calls himself only “the elder.” The letters also tell us to whom they are written—a certain lady and also someone named Gaius. This is not much information and leaves open several questions. But from the letters themselves, we can learn about the one who wrote them.

**Common style and word choices seem to show that the author of 1, 2, and 3 John is the same. What do these three letters tell us about him? As you read, focus on, among other things, some of the words that he uses for those he addresses in the letters (1 John 1:1–3; 1 John 2:1, 18; 1 John 4:4; 2 John 1, 12; 3 John 1, 13, 14).**

Clearly, the author had been an eyewitness to Jesus. He also seemed to have a very close relationship with the church members to whom he wrote. This is because he called them “little children” (NKJV), an example of love and closeness. He had a leadership position in the church. More than once he said that he hoped to

visit those to whom he was writing. The wording and themes are almost the same as those in the Gospel<sup>1</sup> of John. Church fathers also state that he was the apostle<sup>2</sup> John.



**John was an eyewitness  
to the life of Jesus.**

All this brings up a very important point. How important it is that we try to develop a kind, caring, and loving relationship with those around us! It is very clear from these letters that John loved and cared about these people. He wanted them to be strong in the Lord. There can be no doubt that the love he had for them only made his words more meaningful to his readers. What an important lesson for all who try to be witnesses for Jesus and the truths He has given us as a church.

**It is one thing to have a knowledge about who God is, how He saves us, the Second Coming, and**

1. Gospel—one of the first four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus’ life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

2. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

**the Sabbath day. But what happens to our witness if our lives do not show the love of the God who created these truths? Maybe you have some truth to present. But how much love and concern do you show others when you present that truth?**

### MONDAY—JUNE 29

#### WHAT—THE MESSAGES OF THE LETTERS (2 John 1–13)

In 1 John we find several important topics. But the apostle's thoughts do not seem to move forward in some kind of series. For this reason, some scholars believe that John presents his arguments in circles. For example, he repeats his topics from different angles. So, the same things are being discussed from different points of view.

**Follow John's line of thought in 2 John 1–3; 2 John 4; 2 John 5, 6; 2 John 7–11; 2 John 12, 13.**

In 2 John the apostle shows his thankfulness that the lady's children walk in the truth. He also talks about love and obedience. Then John focuses on the false teachers that he already mentioned in his first letter. Again, he uses the word *antichrist* (NKJV).<sup>3</sup> In closing, John tells of the desire to visit his Christian friends. He also gives greetings.

3. antichrist—a person who is against Christ; an enemy of God.

4. doctrinal orthodoxy—a list of doctrines that the church expects its members to follow strictly.

5. Inquisition—during the Dark Ages many Christian believers were put in prison and tortured for not following Roman Catholic doctrines (beliefs).

How does 3 John relate to the first two letters? The first two letters deal with false teachers who are not mentioned in John's last letter. All three letters may deal with almost the same situation but from different points of view. For example, 1 and 2 John warn against false teachers. But 3 John may show how church leadership tried to control the problem.

**In many parts of the world, the idea of "doctrinal orthodoxy"<sup>4</sup> sounds so old-fashioned. It reminds people of such things as the Inquisition.<sup>5</sup> During the Inquisition, people were tortured and killed because they were accused of not being faithful enough to the Roman Catholic Church. So today many people avoid the idea of orthodoxy altogether. They argue that all you need is love, no matter what teaching you believe. But John did not avoid dealing with false teachings. What should this tell us about how we should deal with false teachings in our own church?**

### TUESDAY—JUNE 30

#### WHY—THE PURPOSE OF WRITING THESE LETTERS (1 John 1–4)

**Often John tells us why he wrote his first letter. What is he saying in 1 John 1:4; 1 John 2:12–14; 1 John 5:13?**

All these messages are positive and supportive. But they show that there were serious problems in the churches. John's first letter gives strong warnings against false teachers. These false teachers are called *antichrists*. The word *antichrist* is found four times in 1 John and once in 2 John. But, it is not used anywhere else in the Bible.

These antichrists had false ideas about Jesus Christ. These ideas also influenced<sup>6</sup> their Christian lifestyle. Clearly, John felt the need to deal with these false teachings. And he did so in a powerful and straightforward manner.

But John also points to what true Christianity is. He focuses on its positive nature. John argues that the Father and Son are equal in power. He argues in favor of God's forgiveness and living a life that follows the principle (rule) of love.

John encourages church members. He warns against wrong views of Christ and Christian behavior. He also hopes to win back some of those who have left the church.



John wrote his letters to encourage church members.

In 1 and 3 John, the reasons John wrote the letters are not given. But those reasons are clear. The purpose of 2 John is to warn church members against the wrong teachings of the false teachers listed in 1 John.

According to 3 John, a power struggle was going on. Diotrephes, a false leader, was trying to take control of the church. He tried to gain power by claiming that heresy<sup>7</sup> was a problem in the church. Clearly, Diotrephes was trying to establish power and control.

**John deals with these false teachings by focusing on the positive. There is an important principle here for us. How easy it is to get so caught up in fighting error that we focus on it instead of truth. What is your own way of dealing with what you think is wrong? Do you focus on the error at the expense of truth? How can you start training yourself to deal with problems in a more positive way?**

### WEDNESDAY—JULY 1

#### JESUS IN JOHN'S LETTERS (1 John 5:20)

Jesus is found throughout 1 John. He is at the center of this book. Who is He according to this letter? Read 1 John 1:1; 1 John 1:2; 1 John 1:3; 1 John 4:15; 1 John 2:1; 1 John 2:8; 1 John 2:22; 1 John 4:14; 1 John 5:20.

6. influenced—to have power or an effect over persons or things.

7. heresy—false teaching.

In 1 John, God the Father is mentioned more often than Jesus. But the problem of past members and maybe still active church members is with the Son. Church members and false teachers may have agreed largely on who the Father was. But they disagreed when it came to who Jesus was. Did Jesus “come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2, NKJV), and was He “the Christ” (1 John 2:22, NKJV)?

John clearly argues that it is impossible to separate Father and Son. Even in our times, some people, including some Christians, think they can have a relationship with God the Father without Jesus. For them, Jesus is just a wonderful person. But John’s message is clear: if you know about Jesus but do not accept Him as the Messiah<sup>8</sup> and Son of God, you cannot have a saving relationship with God the Father.



**Jesus is the center of John’s letters.**

8. Messiah—God’s chosen One.

9. ministry—work in preaching and caring for the spiritual needs of people.

10. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners.

**First John has 105 verses. Jesus is mentioned in about 45 of them. What does that tell you about the place Jesus has in this letter? How important is Jesus in your own understanding of truth? That is, might you be too busy with dates, charts, and doctrines instead of Jesus and His forgiveness and grace for yourself? If so, how can you change? Why must you change? (Read John 17:3.)**

## THURSDAY—JULY 2

### JESUS’ MINISTRY<sup>9</sup> IN JOHN’S LETTERS (1 John 1:7)

John’s letters describe Jesus from different points of view. They tell us that He is from the beginning (1 John 1:1). He has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2) and remained righteous (holy), pure, and without sin (1 John 2:1; 1 John 3:3, 5). The letters also tell us about His ministry and work.

Who Jesus is and what He has done are deeply connected. To deny Jesus as both God and man is also to deny His work as Savior and as Lord. Salvation<sup>10</sup> through Jesus depends on Jesus’ being both God and man. Without a proper understanding of Jesus as God and man, you can end up with a different understanding of the plan of salvation and the problem of sin. Sin may be taken lightly or even denied (1 John 1:6–10). This kind of attitude (thought or feeling)



surely will influence Christian behavior and principles.

**What does John tell us about Jesus' ministry and work? What promises are made to us in John's letters because of what Jesus has done or is doing for us now? Read 1 John 1:7; 1 John 2:25; 1 John 2:28; 1 John 3:8; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 5:18; 2 John 3.**

What Jesus has done for us as our Savior and what He is doing for us as our Advocate<sup>11</sup> gives us hope to believe in Him. Forgiveness of sin, the assurance (promise) of salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the hope of the Second Coming, and the promise that we will be like Him and see Him as He is cannot leave our hearts cold. We believe in Him, love Him, obey Him, and follow Him and His teachings.



**Jesus is our Advocate in heaven.**

**Read some of the promises listed before. Which ones mean the most to you, and why? Which ones are you not experiencing in your life as you should? Why might that be, and what can you do to have the richness of these promises?**

### FRIDAY—JULY 3

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read 1 John in one sitting to get an overview of this important letter.

“As the years went by and the number of believers grew, John worked harder and harder for his Christian brothers and sisters. The times were full of danger for the church. Satan's lies and tricks were everywhere. . . . Some Christians claimed that His love freed them from obedience to the law of God. On the other hand, many Christians taught that it was necessary to honor the Jewish customs [practices] and ceremonies.<sup>12</sup> They also claimed that following the law, without faith in the blood of Christ, was enough for salvation. Some held that Christ was a good man but denied that He was truly the Son of God. Some pretended to be true to the cause of God but were really deceivers. In practice they denied Christ and His gospel.<sup>13</sup> Living in sin themselves, they were bringing heresies [false teachings] into the church. So many became doubters and false teachers.

11. advocate—lawyer or go-between; Jesus representing us before God. Jesus brings us back together with God because He paid the penalty of sin.

12. ceremonies—formal acts for religious purposes.

13. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins.

“John was filled with sadness as He saw these poisonous errors spreading within the church. He saw the dangers facing the church, so He dealt with the problem promptly. The letters of John breathe the spirit of love. It seems as if he wrote with a pen dipped in love. But John dealt quickly with those who were breaking the law of God and claiming that they were living without sin. He warned them of their false ideas and teachings.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 553, 554.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Read the Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s study. Suppose she were writing for the church today. What might she write? What are the religious challenges of the church today? In what ways are they almost the same as the ones John was dealing with? What can we learn from John that could help us as we deal with these false teachings?
- 2 As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe we have been given a great deal of truth. It is the truth that many other churches do not have. (After all if they had these truths, then what purpose would we as Seventh-day Adventists serve?) At the same time, how could we as a church better show the love and kindness that must go along with our witness? How can you, either as a group or as a person, help your local church better show the love of God? It is frightening to think of how many people have never accepted truth because we have failed to show kindness, grace, and love. We can and must do better.